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## Inspiring Women: Jenna Casias

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### **Supporting women in project management, construction careers**

When Jenna Casias started working for a local electrical contractor at 19 years old, she had no idea that it would lead her into a career she still loves.

As she continued to work for her employer, she began to embrace the sense of accomplishment, and complexity, of what she was doing. Unfortunately, her aspirations of becoming a project manager herself were cut down by those who told her such a role would be impossible because she was a woman.

“Being told I couldn’t advance in a field I really enjoyed just made me more determined to succeed,” said Casias.

Once she joined the Lab in 2004, she received a very different reception.

“People here mentored and supported me in my aspirations,” she said. “If I had an idea for how to change processes for the better, I was listened to and encouraged to implement my plans.”

As a result, Casias built a portfolio of construction projects with a team of people responsible for the work from cradle to completion.

“When I started at the Lab I was responsible for various projects with small project budgets. In a four-year period supporting Weapons Facility Operations my portfolio value grew from \$4 million to a combined value of \$44 million with the support of a team of high-performing project managers,” said Casias.

While she found the Lab a much better work environment compared to her previous employer, there is still room for improvement.

“Let’s face it, construction is still a male-dominated profession and while things have gotten easier in the past 10 years, its not always easy being a woman in this job,” she said.

To that end, she’s working with members of the Project Management and Capital Projects organizations to bring together other women at the Lab in construction, maintenance and project management so there’s not only a support system for those already doing the work, but there’s outreach as well.

“We not only want to help retain women in these areas but focus on recruiting them for the Lab,” Casias said. “It’s also important that young women with an interest in construction know they have opportunities in these fields. No doors should be closed to them.”

In addition to mentoring both men and women herself, Casias was chosen last month to be part of the Director’s Leadership Development Program. As such, she’ll be part of a cohort who will be challenged and coached to improve their leadership abilities and gain greater understanding of Lab strategic goals.

Casias recently accepted a position with the Weapon Systems Engineering Division in the B-61-21 Life Extension Program Group as a control account manager. While there she is looking forward to using her skills and expertise in this new field to further her commitment to the Laboratory.

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Casias works for the B-61-21's Life Extension Program Group.

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